

i rose from marsh mud by dreamsong69

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Summary:

Pretty is a rose garden, meant to be seen and admired, not to thrive and survive the cold winters.

Barb wouldn't call her a rose; her eldest and dearest and most honest friend would've said she was a weed. A survivor in her own right. Persistent in her fight, determined in her cause, adamant in her survival. That thought was enough to put a smile on Nancy's face.

i rose from marsh mud

Author's Note:

1. The title of this fic is a reference to the poem 'I rose from marsh mud' by Lorine Niedecker
2. Nancy is my girl and I will die for her ok
3. There is no actual plot to this, just poetic rambles of an overly invested fan

In the end, she wasn't a rose. There was no rose garden, here, in the pit of Nancy Wheeler's stomach, no wisps of fairy tale fantasy or the delicate princess she had been.

Weeks after the incident of 1983, her mom suggested seeing a therapist to cope with her loss, but Nancy knew that no amount of plastered smiles of compassion or pouring her heart out could ever truly be of help. Karen Wheeler looked at her eldest daughter with pleading eyes for a long time, separated from her children by a divide whose origins she couldn't even grasp. Mike, for the most part, kept to himself and turned into a washed-out shade of a boy. Nobody knew how to talk to him, not even the ragtag boys who were his brothers in everything but blood.

Nancy felt guilt, of course – guilt and anger and shame stayed by her side, was there in the photographs she and Barb took at beaches, middle school dances, and birthday parties; was there in the lack of laughter in her ribcage; was there in the mangled bodies of her nightmares.

Steve tried to help – he couldn't help it. They had come a long way from when he was the boy who hid beneath gilded armor, and she the pretty girl in the tower. He was a fixer by nature, she realized that now. She would've appreciated him for it – maybe even loved him for it – if his idea of fixing things hadn't meant putting bandages on wounds that were meant to see the light.

Nancy had fell into what she thought was love with an expectant

heart and young eyes; when you were sixteen and kissing a cute boy, you shouldn't think about death, or strange disappearances, or the creeping unknown.

It was funny, really, how things that used to be important to you now flushed with unimportance, pushed back into the shadows of your dreams. Nancy shot bullets into the distance and thought of justice, of the fire in Barb's hair as well as the one in her heart. Jonathan took photographs and looked for subtle hope, for the quiet whirlwind that was Will. In the process they found each other, in shades of shared grief and inner storms.

She had waited a month for him before fading back into pathetic scraps of familiarity. Tried to use Steve's loving smile to mop her own blood, her books and studies to cover splintered cracks in the walls. It was naïve, how she thought any of it would work. That drunken curse – *bullshit* – spilled from her lips like some kind of declaration, but it was too small to even measure the length and width of the pain and frustration of that year.

The point is Nancy Wheeler was just a girl, fighting to reclaim herself as well as her best friend. Cursing the world with a promise to save it ringing in her ears, she sought to strip the lab to its barest bones and seek justice for its victims. She never saw herself as a savior or protector (indeed, that was one of the differences between her and her brother) but they both spent a year scarred and burdened with ghosts.

Nancy was many things, but she'd loathe to be helpless again.

So she surged head-on along the road, a fire in her eyes. There was no rose garden in the pit of stomach; there was an ocean of grief, choppy waves spilling over the shoreline, but that she tried to shove away too. *Focus on your goal. Your numbing fury. Your cry for poetic justice.*

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She watched, broken heart in her throat, as Joyce and Jonathan fell apart to the sound of Will's screams as the monster thrashed and suffered from the heat. She watched as they rebuilt their home, bit by

bit with laughter and persistence and a whole lot of love. She watched as Mike rebuilt himself back to life, smiled behind her hand as he ran headfirst into love. She watched as Eleven looked up to her with awed eyes and called her *pretty*, and told the younger girl there were more important things to be.

Pretty is a rose garden, meant to be seen and admired, not to thrive and survive the cold winters.

Barb wouldn't call her a rose; her eldest and dearest and most honest friend would've said she was a weed. A survivor in her own right. Persistent in her fight, determined in her cause, adamant in her survival. That thought was enough to put a smile on Nancy's face.

She held Barb's death in mind long before the funeral, but the event established the finality of it all. Nancy brought jonquils, the girl's favorite kind, to her grave at least every month. Sometimes Jonathan would come with her, held her in that silent and encompassing way he does. Sometimes she visited with the Hollands. But most days Nancy preferred to be alone.

Not because she was lonely, but because she was finally at some semblance of peace with herself. There were more nights where she didn't collapse into a broken mess of a girl, more days that passed in a bright palette of colors at the Byers' or Hopper's cabin, teaching El math or basking in the comfort of Joyce's hearty dinners.

That didn't mean the nightmares stopped completely. She doubted they ever would. But she knew now that weeds grew in her bones, weaved laughter into her ribcage, made her reborn in ways she never would've known.